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SUBJECT: GOK INCREASES AID FOR TSUNAMI VICTIMS

REF: STATE 959

1. Summary: The GOK's initial pledge of \$1 million in humanitarian assistance immediately after the tsunami was subsequently doubled, then increased to \$10 million by the first week of January. Private aid groups, companies and individual citizens have all stepped forward with donations of money and supplies. Welfare societies representing the many third-country nationals working in Kuwait and hailing from countries affected by the tsunami have banded together to provide direct, targeted aid. An editorial in one of Kuwait's Arabic dailies castigating the GOK for being stingy with aid has received regional and international attention and has led to public "soul-searching," as Kuwait grapples with its perceived obligation to provide aid to both its "Muslim brethren" in the tsunami-hit region and to the home countries of the majority of its expatriate workforce. End Summary.

2. The GOK initially responded to the tsunami by pledging \$1 million in aid on December 26, then doubled it to \$2 million on December 28. On January 2 the GOK raised its pledge of aid to \$10 million, matching the amounts initially pledged by Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The GOK has not said if any additional aid is forthcoming.

3. Aid to the tsunami victims has come from other sources in Kuwait, including individuals, companies, and welfare societies representing the many expatriate workers in Kuwait who come from the affected region. Some examples include: Wataniya Telecom's pledge of 24 tons of aid to the Maldives, Kuwait Airways Corporation's assistance with transport of relief supplies, cash donations from Cargo Transport System Company and Al-Mullah Company, individual anonymous donations, and collections taken up by expatriate religious and community groups such as the Kuwait Malabar Pravasi Congress and others.

4. A January 3 Al-Qabas editorial took the GOK to task for being "cheap" with its aid, and other editorials and commentary reflected the view that the GOK was not properly responding to a disaster that had affected so many of the people who have "formed the workforce (in Kuwait) for the past 40 years." While some individuals have been reportedly reluctant to donate to Muslim charities for fear of being "added to America's list of terror-supporting groups," the Kuwait Joint Relief Committee (part of the International Islamic Charitable Organization) had put together \$100,000 in aid donations by January 5 and expects much more.

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